

Remarks

Claims 1-12 are pending in the application. Claim 12 is newly added.

Claim rejections

Section 103

Claims 1-11 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Meacher et al. (US 5,858,569) ("Meacher") in view of Hiroshi et al. (JP 11-339,828) ("Hiroshi"), or unpatentable over Hiroshi in view of Meacher and further in view of Yoshimura et al. (US 6,291,094) ("Yoshimura"). The Applicant respectfully traverses. The cited references do not support the asserted rejection for at least the reason that they do not disclose or suggest "an anti-corrosion surface treatment on the gas passage portion is different from an anti-corrosion surface treatment on the contact portion, the anti-corrosion surface treatment on the gas passage portion including a carbon coating" as recited in claim 1.

The secondary references Hiroshi and Yoshimura are clearly silent regarding the noted feature. The primary reference, Meacher, also fails to disclose or suggest the noted feature, for at least the reason that it does not disclose or suggest "the anti-corrosion surface treatment on the gas passage portion including a carbon coating" as claimed. Instead, Meacher only discloses "porous graphite ... made in narrow strips" (col. 6, lines 16-17) on a fuel cell separator 46. Porous strips as in Meacher are not effective in preventing corrosion, because oxygen or water penetrates the pores to reach the underlying metal foil 48. Further, the foil 48 between the strips is completely exposed to oxygen or water and thus not protected from corrosion.

By contrast, the metal plate of the separator of the present invention has a carbon coating (a "coating" is different from a "strip") in the gas passage portion, which improves its corrosion resistance to oxygen or water generated in the gas passage portion. The carbon coating can, for example, fill pinholes in a plated surface of the separator and thus improve corrosion resistance. See paragraph [0016] of the present specification.

In view of the foregoing, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

New claim

Regarding new claim 12, the surface treatment applied to the gas passage portion includes a carbon coat, and the surface treatment applied to the contact portion includes no carbon coat. This makes it possible to maintain good corrosion resistance of the gas passage portion while stabilizing the contact resistance of the contact portion. Therefore it is possible to stabilize the contact resistance of the contact portion and to improve the corrosion resistance of the gas passage portion easily. Claim 12 is therefore allowable over the art of record.

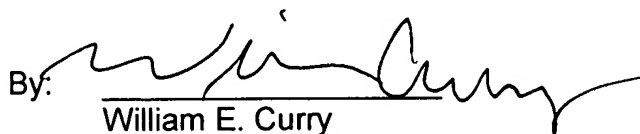
Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, Applicant respectfully submits that the present application is in all aspects in allowable condition, and earnestly solicits favorable reconsideration and early issuance of a Notice of Allowance.

The Examiner is encouraged to contact the undersigned at (202) 220-4323 for any further description or clarification on this response, or regarding any other matter concerning this application. The Office is authorized to charge any fees related to this communication to Deposit Account No. 11-0600.

Respectfully submitted,

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